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Meritocracy In The Civil Service – Young Professionals Scheme – In Romania

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Abstract

In 2003 a joint program, “Young Professional Scheme”(YPS), developed by the Romanian Government and the European Commission was initiated in order to create a corps of professional civil servants, called public managers. As initially presented the scheme supposed to have been inspired and decisively influenced by the UK’s Fast Stream Scheme. The idea of the programme was to have an input of good educational practices in Romania and also a selection process based on skills, abilities, learning capacity and will to change. Its initial purpose was to create a Fast track scheme giving the participants the opportunity to have a career based on merit, out of the usual constraints and outlived procedures of the public administration.

This paper intent to present an objective analysis of the Young Professional Scheme related to the Fast Stream Programme

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1. Introduction

Meritocracy, as defined by Michael Young in 1958, from an etymologist point of view, means the rule of those who deserve to. It is very commonly accepted the approach of the merit from an academic perspective, more exactly as a combination of intelligence, education, training, attitude and effort. Moreover, the base equation – IQ + effort = merit is directly related to education, professional training and the desire to progress. “*Meritocratic models assume that ability can be quantified, separated from the social context, and attributed to the individual. When operating within this framework, one can define merit in different ways*” (De Sario, 2003). Having its own characteristics, the public sector should be treated differently when it comes to define merit. “*There is an assembly of norms, principles*

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and expectations that distinguish the private organizations from the public ones ... the management of private organizations is not identical with the management of public organizations”(Matei 2006). The paradigm “*meritocracy or meritocracies*” (Tenret, 2008) is questioned by the literature, underlining the existence of more than one concept regarding meritocracy, objectified even in different semantics.

2. Specific characteristics of meritocracy in the civil service

Finding meritocratic aspects where the employer is the state, as the civil service for instance, may sometimes be regarded as nonsense. However, both theory and practice prove that those aspects exist, and show us where is place for improvement with measurable results. Studies on applicability of merit system in the civil service have been published over the last decades (ex. Lovrich and Hopkins, 1980; Matei and Matei 2012). The civil service is often strictly regulated by a legal framework. Thus, entering the civil service, promotion, career, behavior etc is regulated by a number of laws, ordinances etc. That creates a boomerang effect when it comes to meritocracy. On one hand having appraisals as basis for promotion, there are reasons to state that, any civil servant will be motivated to constantly seek improvement of his performance, trying to perform in a meritocratic system. However, on what extent can be considered to have a direct link between promotion in a superior grade and the raise of the professional competencies of a civil servant? Too many times the objectives and the appraisal criteria are not connected to the civil servants performances, the indicators just as well, and this situation is sometimes beyond the will of the hierarchical superior. On the other hand strict regulations strictly limit the motivation and career “leaps” which has a negative impact on any aspect that would relate to meritocracy. The vast majority of civil servants is involved in achieving “routine administrative tasks” – applying the laws, procedures, various norms or internal orders. Traditionally, an executive civil servant dedicates most of his/her time for applying such regulations. The possibility to improve the administrative act, and the public service itself, is basically limited to the swiftness and efficiency they achieve in handling their tasks, doubled by an appropriate professional behaviour, as well as a positive attitude towards the citizens. Identifying merit in such environment proves very difficult, presenting a real risk in ending up in discouraging the employees. However, there are aspects closer to meritocracy especially as regards the process of attending a management position, having strict requirements of higher and sometimes specific education, like master degree in a certain domain like management, and communication or leadership abilities as the case may be. Concentrating on management positions regardless of the level, may represent a better, more efficient way to apply meritocratic principles in the public sector. Ultimately, the high ranked civil servants and the civil servants holding managerial positions are responsible for creating a working framework favouring the achievement of the higher standards. They are also responsible for identifying the problems, system breaches, as well as the technical – and not political – solutions for solving such malfunctions. This additional pressure on the public system invariably leads to the design of new strategies which would answer to such changes. One of the proposed measures has been for young people with special professional abilities to be promoted.

3. Young Professionals Scheme (YPS)

The broad aim of the YPS was “*To create, through an accelerated route, a professional corps of public managers within the Romanian Civil Service, with sufficient skills to manage public affairs on a professional, non-political basis, and the necessary ability to deal with the priority areas linked to the transposition and implementation of the acquis communautaire and other EU accession related matters*”. (Sigma 2006) The YPS was limited to two groups, summarized as: graduates up to 30 years old (Scholars), and graduate civil servants up to 35 years old (Trainees). All applicants need proficiency in a major European language to enable them to work or study in the European Union. Four Cycles of this programme have been conducted so far, having as result a total number of 445 public managers as follows:

YPS Cycle 1 – 128 Public Managers – 28 Trainees and 100 Scholars
 YPS Cycle 2 – 110 Public Managers – 62 Trainees and 48 Scholars
 YPS Cycle 3 – 107 Public Managers – 56 Trainees and 51 Scholars
 YPS Cycle 4 – 100 Public Managers – 36 Trainees and 54 Scholars

The scheme incorporates a dual training programme (Trainees and Scholars) the end of the which, psychometric tests to evaluate candidates potential as senior public managers were conducted. The final assessment used the

combination of training (70%) and potential (30%) scores to confirm the status of public manager, and the individual category (very fast track, fast track or enhanced track in decreasing order of merit) of each candidate.

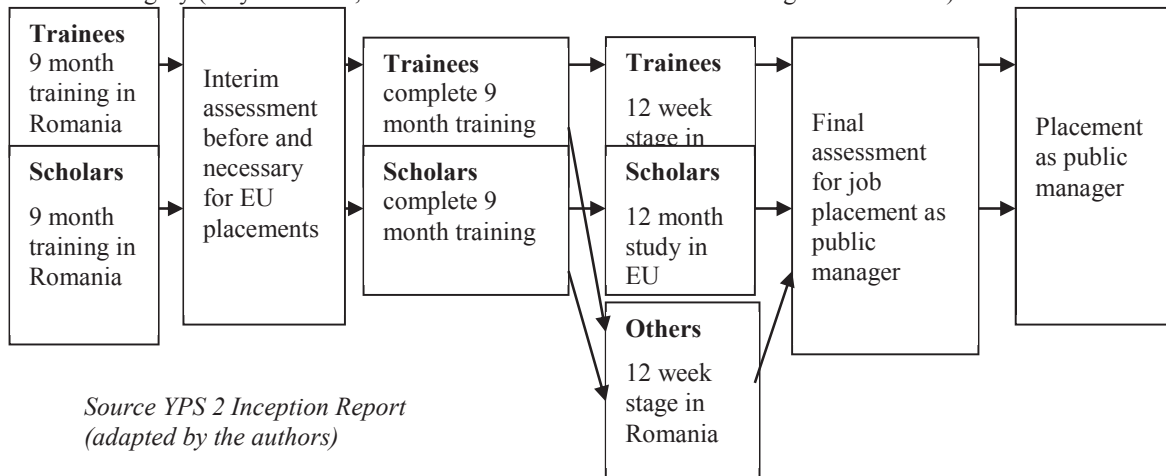


Figure 1 - Broad design of the YPS training component (Cycle 2-4)

Both the interim and final assessments will combine the scores achieved in the potential and training tests. The relative contribution of each type of test to the final total score is examined later, in the context of the relative weightings to be applied to each element of the training assessment.

Block 1	Stage 1	Block 2	Stage 2	Block 3	Interim assessment	Stage 3	Block 4	Final Case study	Year 2 3 month stage 12 month scholarship & Personal Report	Final assessment
Modules 1,2,3	central level line management	Modules 4, 5, 7, 8 Feb-Mar 06	territorial level	Modules 6, 9, 10 May 06		central level strategic management	Modules 11,12, 13,14 Jul-Aug 06			
Personal project: identification>>>outline >>>preliminary work>>>provisional feedback>>>main preparation>>>final assessment										

Source – YPS 2 Interim Report

Figure 2 Modular-Block design of the YPS training component

3.1 Comparison between the Fast Track Scheme and Young Professionals Scheme

The main aspect directly influencing the comparison is the fact that in the Great Britain “Fast Stream” is actually addressed to the entire administrative system, and not only to the central and local authorities where civil servants are employed in Romania¹. Actually, YPS, unlike the British fast stream excludes the rest of the employees from the budgetary system, by exclusively addressing the civil service.

Table 1. Comparison (relevant selection)

Relevant Aspect	UK Fast Stream	YPS
A concept of a fast track scheme in the public sector, addressed to young people.	🚩 YES	🚩 NO The scheme fails to introduce a fast track scheme program, but a parallel scheme within the civil service.
The program is structured, addressed directly to the main area of public administration, specifically designed to train specialist on different public sector domains.	🚩 YES Fast Stream program is formed out of four schemes: 1. GRADUATES' scheme: It has the following options:	🚩 NO This is a generalist program, with only two components with the same final product – the public manager. The program is structured into two components,

¹ A comparative study on recruitment in Romanian PA was published in 2013 (Matei and Matei 2013)

	<p>a) Central Departments. b) Diplomatic Services c) Fast Stream Program in Europe: d) Parliament Chambers: e) Scientists and Engineers, MOD f) Scientists and Engineers, others 2. Economists' Scheme: 3.Statisticians' Scheme: 4.Business Technology Scheme:</p>	<p>relating to two groups of participants:</p> <p>Trainees – young people under 35 years of age, already civil servants</p> <p>Scholars – young graduates, Both components – the trainees and scholars – having the same training curricula. Trainees follow an internship in a EU country. Scholars attend a master program - EU member state university.</p>
Prior requirements regarding the candidate's performance after the graduation of his/her university studies	<p>✚ YES Any Fast Track Scheme candidate should have at least 2:2 in any discipline(Average graduate)</p>	<p>✚ NO No such prior requirement exists, and any higher school education graduate (bachelor) is eligible.</p>
Placement considers the program	<p>✚ YES Actually the graduate's scheme is what counts in the graduates' placement – for instance the diplomatic service will receive graduates of the diplomatic scheme.</p>	<p>✚ NO Placement is automated depending on the graduate's option, position in the program rank and available positions.</p>
System reintegration	<p>✚ YES Graduates are prepared to occupy responsibility positions in the system. Once they graduate from the program, they are reintegrated in the administrative system.</p>	<p>✚ NO The public manager career is parallel with the public position, it includes distinct appraisals, promotion ranks and no clear "exit" appears from the public manager position.</p>

4. Conclusions

The conclusion of this comparison is that it is a false assertion to say that the British Fast Stream represented as model for the YPS concept. There are essential differences between the two programs and besides those differences which could not have been avoided due to system particularities, there are elements of Fast Stream which should have and could have been reflected by the YPS.

Table 2. The table below illustrates a synthesis of some of the above mentioned differences.

Fast Stream feature	YPS
Specialized with more than one component, each focused on a major public administration area.	General program for the entire administration.
Selection is structured and conceived so as to answer to the needs and structure of the program.	The same selection process for both categories.
Integration into the system answers to real and actual needs of the public administration.	In the placement process, the graduate's option weights more than the real need of an area or of a public institution.
Real possibility to "burn stages", that is actual promotion.	The scheme is actually parallel to the public system, it is a separated career.

The Young Professional Scheme has only used the idea of the Fast Stream Scheme as a model, not the programme itself. As a result, the outcome of the programme was far from the initial plan. There were significant delays in the placement process for both trainees and scholars; Most Public Managers received a position that reflected their own work preference; Current legislative provision for Public Managers runs parallel to the Civil Service Law. The result, after 12 years and 4 YPS cycles is that the Public Managers scheme runs parallel to the Civil Service Law, the financial motivation has substantially decreased, the training provider (National Institute of Administration) no longer exists, the Commission for Public Managers no longer exists (assimilated by the National Agency for Civil Service). The programme was terminated, after 4 cycles and 445 graduates, having only approx 20 Public Managers in managerial positions, and only one is a high ranked civil servant.

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